What evidence-based practices can schools adopt?

- While research evidence for some Australian whole-school approaches to prevent and respond to bullying is available, many bullying programs have no research evidence or demonstrable outcomes.

- A sense of urgency about finding solutions to bullying can lead to calls for untested or un-researched programs and interventions to be rapidly adopted. While the desire to 'do something' is understandable, there is no 'quick-fix'.

- Effective school practice is informed by research; information about what doesn't work is as valuable as information about what does work.

- Approaches to countering bullying are either primarily preventative or responsive, but some are a combination. Both prevention and appropriate responses if bullying does occur are necessary.

- The emerging evidence suggests that a well-managed, comprehensive, whole-school, multi-pronged and integrated approach to bullying, which necessarily requires time, skills and resources to implement effectively, is the most likely to result in sustained positive change in the school and wider community.

- A social-ecological view of bullying leads to prevention and responses in which children and young people are encouraged to learn about how relationships work, and how values and norms are formed (and reformed) in society by each generation.

- Exploring the nature of social groups, norms, membership, hierarchy and power are important in empowering students to navigate their social world in positive and respectful ways.

- The views of students about what works to counter bullying have not yet been sufficiently explored in high-quality research.

- Even for those approaches and programs for which evidence exists, effectiveness ultimately rests with appropriate implementation by the school.

- The most frequently identified issues in implementation are the 'shortcuts' or changes that schools make to suit their context and capacities, which can change the approach or program to such a degree that effectiveness is compromised.

- While there is much yet to learn about how to influence good practice and support change in schools, the growing field of implementation science is beginning to reveal important factors for schools relevant to anti-bullying approaches.

- Fundamental to gaining wider use of research-informed practices in schools is the genuine support and agreement of educational sectors at all levels for such practices.

- Understanding the realities of the school context and teachers' necessary focus on delivering curriculum is important for establishing reasonable expectations of everyone within the wider school community.

- In addition to formal research, school-directed and school-initiated studies on the effectiveness of various approaches to respond and prevent bullying can refine and bolster knowledge.

- 'Practice-based' evidence from schools, combined with the best evidence provided by research, equips schools to take on the challenge of addressing the pervasive cultural phenomenon of bullying.

Implications for schools

- Effective school practice is informed by high-quality evidence. Schools should avoid untested approaches which may offer little more than the sense of 'doing something'. Schools need to be alert that enthusiasm and promotion can outweigh the evidence for an approach.

- Knowing what does not work is also important to guide schools' practices. Schools need to avoid strategies or programs known to be ineffective or with no evidence; not only are they a waste of time, they may have negative outcomes for students.

- Schools need to be realistic that a well-managed, comprehensive, whole-school, multi-pronged and integrated approach to bullying will necessarily require time, skills and resources to implement effectively.

- While focused on the school setting for implementation, whole-school programs require parent and community support to maximise their effectiveness for the student population.

- Bullying will be most effectively addressed through a 'multi-pronged' approach involving cooperation between all stakeholders (parents, teachers and students), and investment in resourcing and capacity building for schools, police, legal services and community organisations to support their involvement in preventative and responsive actions against bullying.

- Frameworks guide schools to undertake the necessary range of actions and strategies to counter bullying, and reduce piecemeal approaches, poorly coordinated efforts, and doubts being raised within the school community.

- Approaches which focus on social-emotional learning and equipping students with skills to deal with problems, conflict and other adversity show considerable promise in terms of countering bullying.

- In terms of maximising limited time and resources, research on the ages, patterns and forms of bullying suggests that the largest positive effect may be produced through concentrated effort in the middle primary school years, just prior to the transition to secondary school, and within the first two years of secondary school.

- Schools can bolster program effectiveness by planning well for implementation and sustainability.

- Implementation entails a change process that embeds and sustains the intervention in a real-world setting (staged activities and drivers to build infrastructure and capacity), and enables the school to change its way of doing things.

- Even evidence-based anti-bullying approaches cannot be effective without being implemented 'with fidelity' (as intended) and without the inclusion of the whole-school community.

- Schools can share their school-directed and school-initiated research on the effectiveness of various approaches to respond and prevent bullying to add to the picture provided by formal research.

- Schools can access reviews of programs and approaches at KidsMatter and Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) websites.

- The time and effort to investigate the evidence base for a particular anti-bullying approach is an investment in the school and the students. Schools are too busy to waste time on ineffective programs, and students rely on schools to implement anti-bullying approaches that work.

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